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Prologue

A/N: Tell me what you guys think of the cover! :D Also, I will still be updating WBR to post bonus chapters!

Shadekit POV

Fawnkit and I spoke in hushed whispers. I was fearful that some cat would overhear and report our plans to Bumblestar. Tonight, while every cat was asleep, Fawnkit and I would make our escape.

I groaned inwardly as Nightkit scurried into the nursery. My foolish brother blindly followed Bumblestar and believed every word that foxheart said. Nightkit looked over his shoulder a few times, as if he was worried that he was being followed.

I hesitated before speaking up. "Why...why do you look so afraid? Did you disappoint Bumblestar?"

Nightkit's green eyes met mine. "I'm not afraid for me."

"Then what..." A shiver crept down my spine as I realized what he was implying. "Why are you afraid for me?"

"Bumblestar wants both of you dead. He knows about your plan," Nightkit muttered.

Was this a trap? Was Bumblestar trying to trick me into admitting that I was disloyal? "What plan?"

Nightkit rolled his eyes impatiently. "Your plan to run away together to ShadowClan tonight."

My eyes widened. "And so he sent you to kill me. Do it, brother. You're loyal to Bumblestar, aren't you?"

"I am not loyal to that psychotic tyrant!" Nightkit hissed.

"You're not?" I asked skeptically.

"Of course I'm not! I'm just not mouse-brained enough to show it like you do! Look where it got you!" Nightkit spat. "I will make him trust me, and then one day, when I'm older and stronger, I will kill him! Slowly and painfully in the worst possible way that I can imagine! The way we both know, even though nobody will tell us, that he killed our mother!"

I gasped. "Oh my StarClan...you think HE killed our mother? But...it makes sense though. I swear I'm gonna gouge out his eyes and tear out his heart, and then I'm gonna eat his flesh and bite off..."

Nightkit sighed. "I think the wise decision now, brother, would be for you and Fawnkit to run. Run away as quickly as you can. Because even though I won't kill you, Bumblestar will just use someone else to do it. I will buy you as much time as I can."

And all this time, I had believed he was Bumblestar's slave! How wrong I had been.

"Let's go, Fawnkit!" I walked towards the entrance to the nursery, but stopped a moment and looked over my shoulder at Nightkit. "May StarClan light your path. And I take back what I said. I...our mother would be very proud of you."

Nightkit shook his head. "No, brother. She would be more proud of you, I think. Don't waste time debating that with me. Go! There's no time for games!"

Fawnkit and I hurried out into the clearing, and blinked in surprise as we saw ShadowClan cats fighting with ThunderClan. I knew it was ShadowClan because I recognized their scent from when Bumblestar had kidnapped Ratscar and Graypaw. If I had been thinking at the time, I would've used their scent trail to find my way back to their territory. But I was in too much shock to think properly.

I glanced briefly over my shoulder to see Nightkit watching us from outside the nursery. He gave me a short nod and then ran off towards Bumblestar. He vanished as the thorn tunnel swallowed us. It would be moons before I saw him again.

A/N 2: I hope you guys like book 3 so far! :D

Chapter One: The Rule

Bumblestar POV

The rule had only existed for a day, and it had already been broken.

After the battle against ShadowClan and RiverClan, I had found it necessary to place new restrictions on my cats. The skirmish had almost caused the collapse of ThunderClan, and, worried about my own safety, I had resumed having a bodyguard, except this time, at all times, not just at night. No more than two cats could speak to me at once, in case a group of them tried to gang up on me and murder me. I didn't trust my own warriors almost as much as I didn't trust ShadowClan.

I had also allowed Nightkit and Redkit to become apprentices, even though Nightkit was only slightly over five moons of age. Redkit was six moons old though, so altering her status wasn't against the code. They were both worthy of apprenticeship in my eyes, and anyways, I didn't give a mouse-tail about what StarClan thought.

The final change was I implemented a simple, basic rule that was actually quite easy to follow. It was only created because of the whole Shadekit-Fawnkit disaster. Any cat caught crossing into another Clan's territory without my permission would cause me to automatically assume they were trying to leave the Clan, and they would be executed for treason. So all they had to do was stay in our territory, but no. Of course it couldn't be that simple.

Sandstorm had tried to sneak out of camp through the dirtplace tunnel so that she could flee to ShadowClan. Perhaps she thought I was planning on doing something to the elders, which I actually wasn't. I had followed her and watched as she began to hobble across the border...then I stopped her. At least she came back with me willingly, so that I could have the satisfaction of executing her in front of the whole Clan.

I summoned the Clan for a meeting. "I caught this she-cat while she

was trying to leave this Clan! Cats of ThunderClan, look to your elder. Let her serve as an example. My dear, I can assure you this will be quick and painless. Wait here."

The quick and painless may or may not have been sarcasm.

I hurried into Jayfeather's den. Sandstorm and the rest of the Clan whispered to each other in confusion, wondering what I was doing. I looked around the den, searching for the herbs I needed. Thankfully, Firestar had made all of the apprentices and younger warriors learn basic herbal knowledge seasons ago. I spotted the water hemlock leaves near the back of one of the crevices in the den wall, and the bright scarlet berries next to them were nearly impossible to miss.

I crushed the berries with a forepaw, then wrapped the leaves around the smashed berries and juice. I placed the deadly mixture around a branch, so that I could carry it out without getting any of the poison in my mouth.

I dropped it at Sandstorm's forepaws. "Eat that. Or else I will find something more painful."

Sandstorm hesitantly sniffed it. "What is it?"

Oh nothing much, just a mixture of water hemlock and deathberries! Not painful at all! Completely harmless, really.

"It's called, um...oh yeah, nightsleep leaves!" I lied. "Yeah, they, uh, they knock you unconscious and then, um, they...they slow your heart and you die in your sleep!"

I quickly shot Jayfeather a warning look as the blind gray tabby opened his mouth to object, then remembered he couldn't see it. I coughed purposefully, and the medicine cat seemed to understand, because he lowered his head. Obviously, he knew I was lying though, because first of all, nightsleep leaves are not even real. I had just made the story up on the spot. And secondly, he could probably smell what it actually was. Sandstorm, however, would not recognize the mixture.

Sandstorm sighed. "You're a disgrace, Bumblestar."

I chuckled. "Just eat the leaves already."

"Death is kinder than staying in this sorry excuse of a Clan!" Sandstorm hissed. "Besides, I can see Firestar again in StarClan."

She lapped up the leaves and glared at me defiantly. For a few moments, nothing happened. A few cats looked at each other uncertainly.

"What is this?! Why are my paws numb?!" Sandstorm shrieked.

Her legs buckled underneath her. She began to convulse from the two poisons, and foam seeped out of her mouth. Her claws tore up large clumps of grass as she thrashed about, and I heard her gasping for breath as she slowly suffocated. Her blood was surely on fire, and I believed that ancient she-cat deserved to suffer like that. She had too much attitude, and she was always questioning my decisions. Spasms continued to travel through her body, and I watched in amusement. I thought back to another day, a great day awhile back, when I had killed Millie, but only with deathberries. I had been so glad to see my kittypet mother die in such a horrid manner.

Eventually, Sandstorm's body fell still. I kicked dust over her corpse as a sign of disrespect and turned to the crowd of gathered cats. An eerie silence had fallen over the Clan. Many cats' eyes were stretched wide with horror. Foxleap looked nauseous, and even Redpaw and Nightpaw looked revolted.

I laughed evilly. "Would anyone else like to leave? If you would, now is your opportunity!"

Hm, I wonder why nobody did?

A/N: This book WILL have Nightpaw and Shadepaw POV, but there will still be some Bumblestar chapters! Hope you guys enjoyed, must admit I am SO HAPPY I KILLED SANDSTORM YAY! SHES ANNOYING AND IMMORTAL SO SHE NEEDED TO DIE AT SOME POINT IN THIS SERIES! XD

Chapter Two: Training

Nightpaw POV

"Nightpaw! Wake up!" a voice called from outside of the apprentices den.

Unfortunately, that was the deep, rough voice of the one and only Bumblestar. The ThunderClan leader had chosen to be my mentor. Apparently he was quite fond of me, and wanted to personally teach me his sinister ways.

I groaned and forced myself to rise, knowing Bumblestar was an impatient cat and would be unhappy if I made him wait. I padded out of den and stretched lazily in the sunlight. I wondered what we were going to do. Yesterday, we had done nothing, due to his sickening show of slaughtering Sandstorm, who was an innocent elder. Foxleap had tried to have Redpaw and I do apprentice duties, but Bumblestar wouldn't allow it. The ThunderClan leader insisted his "favorites" were exempt from such things. The younger warriors were forced to deal with the unpleasant task instead.

The day before yesterday, my first day as an apprentice, we had toured the territory with Redpaw and her mentor, Foxleap. The lake was stunning, with its vast expanse of rippling blue-gray water leaving me in awe of StarClan's power. The forest itself, though, actually left me disappointed. I expected more than just trails, undergrowth, and trees.

We had also been taken to the borders. When we arrived at the edge of ShadowClan territory, Bumblestar had mumbled something about it not being the ShadowClan border "for much longer." I was uncertain what that meant, but I had a feeling ShadowClan would not enjoy finding out.

ShadowClan. Had my brother and Fawnkit made it safely there? I hoped so. If they had settled into ShadowClan, I knew their lives were in jeopardy if Bumblestar were to launch an attack on their

camp. I prayed to StarClan that Bumblestar was not planning on besieging their camp.

"What are we doing?" I asked.

"Battle training," Bumblestar replied. "*Real* battle training."

"Great!" I exclaimed, trying to seem enthusiastic. "Can you teach me the death blow? Please?"

Bumblestar chuckled. "In time. You must learn how to defeat an opponent if you wish to have the opportunity to kill them. However, I'm proud that you've already learned the most important lesson. The only way to truly win a battle is to kill your enemy. If they don't die, their wounds heal, and they eventually return, but often they return stronger than they were when you fought them the first time."

I wanted to give him a skeptical look and then scream, "YOU'RE DELUSIONAL!" However, I just nodded as if I agreed with him. Bumblestar seemed satisfied with that response. He turned and bounded out of the thorn tunnel into the forest, beckoning for me to follow with a wave of his tail. I sighed but hurried after him, knowing I had to keep up the act.

The ThunderClan leader followed the main path out of camp. Although he was only jogging, I had to sprint to keep up with him, due to my short legs. Another reason why I shouldn't have been apprenticed until I reached six moons of age, but Bumblestar had chosen to ignore the warrior code. Clearly StarClan were much wiser than Bumblestar, and most certainly in more than just this area.

There was a fork in the path and we veered off to the left. The land began to slope downwards and we skidded to a halt at the foot of the hill. I was breathless, but Bumblestar's breathing seemed perfectly normal. Wasn't he tired after running that far? I then reminded myself that he had only been jogging. Of course he wasn't tired.

Bumblestar's eyes scanned the perimeter, and for a heartbeat, I

thought I saw a spark of regret flash in his usually emotionless amber eyes. I blinked and it was gone. I must've imagined it. "This is the training hollow," Bumblestar told me. "We will come here to learn battle moves."

Perhaps one day I could use these moves against Bumblestar! "Alright, Bumblestar! I'm looking forward to this! What are we learning first?"

Bumblestar laughed evilly. "Basics. I'm gonna teach you a great strategy that's easy to master."

I was worried to find out what this strategy was. "First move an apprentice learns is how to dart by and rake your claws down an opponent's side, right?"

"Well, normally. But I'm gonna teach you something much better. A strategy that those ShadowClan and RiverClan weaklings will never expect," the ThunderClan leader purred. "It's quite simple, Nightpaw. Aim for the eyes. If you rake your claws across either one of their eyes just once...they will scream like a kit and collapse, I assure you."

I wanted to gag. Aiming for the eyes?! That was the cheap move of a rogue, not one of a warrior!

I was saved from having to pretend to appreciate Bumblestar's tactics when Foxleap appeared, with Redpaw trailing behind him. "Foxleap!" the ThunderClan leader exclaimed, his eyes shining with excitement. "You're just on time! You trained Redpaw after the tour of the territory, right? Nightpaw, Redpaw, I'm going to allow you to test your skills! You're going to fight each other."

I nodded. "Alright Bumblestar."

"The winner gets to go to Gathering tomorrow night!" Bumblestar announced. "However, the loser will be punished! The loser may not eat at all for the rest of today, all of tomorrow, and until sunhigh the day after tomorrow."

Not eat for two whole days?! My stomach was already rumbling,

and I had just eaten a mouse last night! I had to win this. I faced Redpaw, narrowed my eyes in determination, and tensed my muscles to leap at her.

"NO! Not like that!" Bumblestar hissed. "I will not allow cats with so much potential to waste their talent and fight like weaklings! Claws unsheathed!"

Claws unsheathed?! Was he completely mad?! We could both get seriously injured!

Bumblestar figured out what I was thinking. "Don't hurt each other too much. Just enough so that you can feel the pain. Warriors of my Clan must learn how to endure pain. NOW FIGHT!"

A/N: Hope you guys enjoyed! Sorry for starting a war between Sandstorm fans and Sandstorm haters, I didn't mean to XD I just wanted her dead! Sorry to those of you who like her XD

Chapter Three: Death Follows

Shadekit POV

"ShadowClan needs any allies we can get against this mad tyrant," Rowanstar's voice rang throughout the camp. "Bumblestar has gone completely insane and will stop at nothing until he gets what he wants-which is to kill everyone other than those who will follow him blindly. We can no longer treat ThunderClan as warriors; they must be treated as rogues because they are ruled by one. ShadowClan desperately needs new warriors, which is why I've decided to allow Shadekit and Fawnkit to become apprentices. I acknowledge that it is a risk, and they could very well be spies from Bumblestar, but it is a risk that we must take. These are desperate times that call for desperate measures."

Fawnkit and I had stumbled across the returning ShadowClan battle patrol. They had glared at us suspiciously and had probably only not attacked us because we were kits. I begged Rowanstar to take us to the camp and then told him the whole story in front of all of ShadowClan. How Bumblestar was planning to kill us, how we had only escaped because of Foxleap, and how we were hoping we could take refuge in ShadowClan. Thankfully, most of the cats seemed to believe my narrative. It was the honest truth, except for where I lied about my age, claiming that we were both six moons old. For Fawnkit, that was a true statement, but I had only just reached five moons of age. I didn't want to deceive Rowanstar; honesty is the key to trust after all, but I wanted to join the fight against Bumblestar as soon as possible. The end justifies the means. Bumblestar needed to be overthrown for the forest to know peace, and anything that I did to accomplish that was justified in my opinion.

This wasn't quite how I'd imagined my apprentice ceremony when I dreamed about it as a kit. I had pictured myself standing before the Highledge with my brother at my side. I had always thought it would be my mother reciting the words of this ceremony. Never

had I thought that I would be encircled by pines instead of stone walls, that ShadowClan would be the one chanting my apprentice name instead of ThunderClan, or that my brother would not be with me. Yet here I was.

"Fawnkit, from this moment on, you will be know as Fawnpaw. Your mentor will be Spikefur. Spikefur, this will be your first apprentice. You learned much from Ferretclaw, and I expect you to pass on these things to Fawnpaw," Rowanstar said.

I half-expected Spikefur to look at Fawnpaw distastefully, but the dark brown tom's amber eyes were warm as he touched noses with her. I trembled with anticipation of receiving my apprentice name, sinking my claws into the soggy ground nervously.

Rowanstar's gaze swept over to me and he gave me a slight nod. "Shadekit, from this moment on, you will be known as Shadepaw. Your mentor will be Tawnypelt. Tawnypelt, you of all cats certainly understand how it feels to switch Clans and spend your life proving your loyalty to your new Clan. I trust that you will teach Shadepaw all that you know."

I shuffled my paws awkwardly and then shot a hesitant glance at my mentor. I expected to see scorn or distrust in her green eyes. Instead, Tawnypelt's eyes were filled with sympathy, and she gave me an encouraging nod. Breathing a sigh of relief, I padded over to my mentor and touched noses with her.

There was a bit of hesitation, but then one cat at the back of the crowd called out our names. The rest of the Clan quickly joined in, except for a few warriors who stared at us with suspicion lingering in their eyes. I ignored them and puffed out my chest with pride. I didn't care what any cat thought; I would prove my loyalty and defeat Bumblestar.

Spikefur padded over to Tawnypelt. The two had a quick, hushed conversation before turning to me and Fawnpaw. "The two of you don't need to separate yet. We're going to explore the territory together. C'mon, follow me," Tawnypelt meowed, walking towards the camp entrance.

I glanced at Fawnpaw. Her beautiful light brown fur was slightly ruffled by the wind. It looked so soft, and I wanted nothing more than to bury my head in that fur and forget that this nightmare known as my life had happened. Her sky blue eyes met mine.

"Fawnpaw, I just want you to know that I could never do this without you," I whispered.

"I couldn't do this without you either, Shadepaw," she purred. "C'mon, let's go. Our mentors are waiting."

I hurried after Spikefur and Tawnypelt, but as we had just exited into the forest, we collided with a ShadowClan warrior who was dashing madly back towards the camp. There was a frantic look in his eyes, which were abnormally wide.

"Crowfrost? What's wrong?" Tawnypelt demanded.

"It's ThunderClan," Crowfrost panted. "They claimed all of the land almost all the way back to our camp. I fear they will come to our camp after they finish marking what they decided were the new borders."

Spikefur and Tawnypelt exchanged worried looks. "We must get back to camp and tell Rowanstar," Spikefur decided. "Sorry, Fawnpaw. We're going to have to tour the territory later. This is urgent and must be dealt with now."

What if Bumblestar had somehow found out that Fawnpaw and I were in ShadowClan? Was he coming here to accomplish his mission of killing us? Or was he planning something much worse than simply hunting two kits?

Fawnpaw's blue eyes were troubled. "Whatever Bumblestar is planning, it will almost certainly have horrible consequences for all the Clans. Wherever Bumblestar goes, death follows."

The five of us raced back into the camp. "Rowanstar! ThunderClan claimed all of the land extending almost all of the way up to our camp! They might be coming here next!"

Just as Rowanstar emerged from his den, a patrol of WindClan

warriors, led by Ashstar herself, poured into the camp.

A/N: I am so so so so SO sorry for such a long wait. Thank you for your patience, I promise I will update at least every other day or so now.

But...

I'M ALIVE! I JUST GOT OUT OF SCHOOL! That means I'm back from my one month hiatus that I used to focus on school because I was spending so much time on here that my grades were suffering. You can expect tons of updates for summer! :) Love you guys, thanks for sticking with me! Hope you enjoyed the newest chapter, what do you think Bumblestar is planning? Or was Bumblestar involved in this plan at all?

Chapter Four: Price You Pay

Ratscar POV

I sighed wearily as a patrol of WindClan warriors charged into our camp. If WindClan was attacking us, that meant ThunderClan would likely follow soon. Just as the wounds from the last battle were just beginning to heal, of course Bumblestar and Ashstar were ready to fight again.

To my surprise, the WindClan cats did not attack. Instead, they simply formed a line in front of the camp entrance. Perhaps this wasn't an attack?

Ashstar stepped forward. "Well, ShadowClan, you have a choice. You can join our alliance, or you can surrender all of your territory and be held hostage in your own camp. I can assure you, no ShadowClan cat will be entering or leaving this camp until this is settled."

I snarled with outrage. "ShadowClan will never surrender or partner with rogues!"

Yowls of agreement echoed across the clearing. I was glad to see that my Clan supported me. I just hoped that Rowanstar wouldn't give in. We could not allow fear to control us.

Rowanstar approached Ashstar, narrowing his eyes. "ShadowClan never wanted a war with either of your Clans, but if a war is what you want, then that is what you will get."

"I do not wish for war. All I want is to make my Clan stronger, and any path that helps that is the one I will choose to take," Ashstar responded.

"Have you gone completely mad?!" Rowanstar hissed. "How does bloodshed and death help any of the Clans?"

Ashstar waved her tail indifferently. "It's the price you pay."

"What is that even supposed to mean?!" Rowanstar spat.

"The cost of greatness was always high," Ashstar replied. "But it is a price that my Clan and I are willing to pay. One day, WindClan will be respected."

Rowanstar shook his head in disgust. "Greatness and violence are two very different things. Greatness is found in knowing when to fight and also when to compromise, and sometimes choosing to show compassion rather than anger. You will never be great, Ashstar; a fox is more worthy of the word than you."

Ashstar chuckled. "Brave words; an impressive speech, I must say. But you are quite a hypocrite, Rowanstar. If you believe in compassion, then why are you willing to kill innocent ThunderClan warriors?"

"Bumblestar must be killed. Any cats willing to protect him must suffer the same fate," Rowanstar replied.

"Would you not expect your own warriors to defend you as their leader?" Ashstar countered. "Molewhisker was not to blame for your troubles."

Rowanstar sighed. "Sometimes, innocent cats need to die to save the forest. It's for the greater good."

Ashstar nodded. "I completely agree with that statement. I suppose you understand why WindClan is here now?"

"There could be peace if you and Bumblestar would allow it. There is no need for any casualties today. StarClan would never approve of this," Rowanstar said.

"Our ancestors were brave enough to make difficult choices. I'm sure they understand. Now, I advise that you join us, but what is your choice?" Ashstar asked.

Bumblestar was an evil, heartless cat. ShadowClan could not ally with him! I would rather die than be on the same side as

Bumblestar.

"Don't do it Rowanstar!" I shouted.

Rowanstar hesitated. "We'll join you, but I wish to go the ThunderClan camp to speak to Bumblestar."

Ashstar nodded. "Very well. My warriors will accompany us."

I watched in disbelief as Rowanstar walked up next to Ashstar. He couldn't just join them! I would've never thought our leader was a coward, but I was beginning to rethink that...

But then, without warning, Rowanstar sliced his claws across Ashstar's throat. Ashstar's eyes widened with surprise, and then her knees buckled. The WindClan leader fell lifeless on the ground. Rowanstar scampered backwards as furious WindClan warriors charged at him. "ShadowClan, attack!" Rowanstar yowled.

I charged forward with my Clanmates. ShadowClan would never give in to these Clans that were led by lunatics! This battle was about so much more than Clan rivalries; this was a war to protect StarClan, integrity, and the warrior code.

I unsheathed my claws and leapt at Harespring.

A/N: New chapter, yay! :) Please share your thoughts, I hope you enjoyed! Thanks for all of your support and for your patience, I truly appreciate it.

Chapter Five: A No-Lose Situation

Ratscar POV

I tackled Harespring, who snarled furiously at me. The brown-and-white tom struggled against my grip as I kept him pinned to the ground. I managed to deal a few blows to his side before I was pulled off of him by another WindClan warrior. As I was dragged backwards, I was able to catch a glimpse of the battlefield. A few of the WindClan warriors had formed a protective circle around their fallen leader while the others had proceeded to attack the other members of ShadowClan. Cats were engaged in vicious skirmishes across the clearing; the two Clans seemed to be deadlocked currently. It seemed that this would be a long and costly battle, but at least there was no sign of ThunderClan yet.

I was thrown to the ground and found myself staring up at a gray tom, who I recognized to be Emberfoot. With a hiss, I rolled out of the way of a blow aimed for my cheek. I scrambled to my paws and turned to face the WindClan warrior, but was knocked back over again by Harespring, who I had ignored. Pain surged through my body as Harespring's claws dug into my stomach. I attempted to throw him off of me a few times, but that proved to be fruitless. Thinking quickly, I fell limp in his grasp, and then, after a few moments, tried to slither out of it. Harespring must've been expecting this, as his grip tightened. I struggled to breathe as his paw pressed down on my chest. Emberfoot, seeing that his clanmate had me pinned, launched himself at Sedgewhisker, who was already struggling to defeat another ShadowClan warrior.

Harespring chuckled and traced his claw slowly across my stomach, reopening many of the wounds that I had received from Bumblestar in the recent battle at ThunderClan's camp. "You cats are pathetic. You're fighting a losing battle, and yet you cannot be sensible and surrender. WindClan is bet..."

Starlingwing barreled into his side, sending the brown-and-white WindClan warrior tumbling to the ground. "You were saying?" the ShadowClan warrior spat.

I wearily rose to my paws and gave the ginger tom a nod. "Thanks."

"Well, it looks like ShadowClan does not wish to comply!" I glanced over my shoulder in the direction of the loud voice to see a weak-looking Ashstar rising to her paws from inside of her protective circle. "This is an interesting battle, isn't it? Well, rest assured, this is only the beginning! Let the real fun begin!"

Foxleap bounded into the camp, followed by a group of about 10 cats. Some of them were ThunderClan warriors, but half of them appeared to be rogues, because I did not recognize them and they had a disheveled appearance. I curled my lip in disgust. Had Bumblestar resorted to manipulating and allying with rogues?! He truly had no respect for the warrior code or his ancestors in StarClan!

The battle had momentarily halted, and the ThunderClan cats were not showing any signs of attacking. What were they waiting for?

Foxleap lifted his chin with pride and took a few steps forward. "WindClan, form a blockade in front of the entrance. Okay, so, basically ShadowClan, you're not worth our energy or time. We're just going to keep you confined in here until you all starve to death or agree to surrender. If anyone tries to leave, we will kill you without hesitation."

"Why, Foxleap?!" Rowanstar hissed. "Why are you doing this?!"

Foxleap stared at him indifferently. "More land for us and WindClan, and one of Bumblestar's main enemies will be gone. It's a no-lose situation!"

Bumblestar POV

I watched with amusement as Nightpaw leapt at Redpaw, who rolled out of the way. The two apprentices were young and loyal, and it seemed that they would do anything to please me. It was best

that they learned now that only the strongest survive in this world, and that claws were the only true sign of strength. It was also good that they had never learned the foolish morality that StarClan demanded; diplomacy and kindness were for weak cats. My favorite apprentices had to learn to never hesitate to inflict pain on an enemy or to obey an order. I would turn these apprentices into ruthless, loyal servants who would do my bidding.

Nightpaw ducked under a clumsy blow that Redpaw aimed at his head, and the reddish-brown she-cat staggered backwards as Nightpaw's claws sliced across her nose. As Nightpaw was preparing for another attack, a wide-eyed Spiderleg appeared through the bushes on the opposite side of the clearing, sprinting towards me. With an irritated sigh, I ordered the apprentices to pause the skirmish. "What is so important that you thought it was acceptable to interrupt a valuable training session?!" I demanded.

Spiderleg looked at me, gasping for breath. "Foxleap...took a...patrol...to ShadowClan..w-with Ash..."

I did not wait for the black-furred warrior to finish his sentence, as I had already figured out what he was trying to tell me. "HE DID WHAT?! Nightpaw, Redpaw, return back to camp. Spiderleg, accompany them; they probably don't remember which trail to take."

Nightpaw stared at me in confusion. "What about you? Where are you going?"

I narrowed my eyes. "I'm taking a little trip to the ShadowClan camp."

Ratscar POV

Rowanstar glared at the ThunderClan deputy. "So ThunderClan is working with rogues now? And also, this doesn't seem like one of Bumblestar's moves. Bumblestar has always sent massive battle patrols, and he usually attacks when he visits another Clan's camp. Keeping us trapped in our own camp doesn't seem like something he would plan. Speaking of that; where is Bumblestar? He never stays behind for things like this!"

The complacent gleam in Foxleap's eyes vanished momentarily, but returned almost as quickly as it had disappeared. "I am here without Bumblestar's consent."

I gasped in shock. Foxleap, the loyal ThunderClan deputy, was giving orders and initiating attacks without Bumblestar's permission?! Why would he decide to do this? Had his loyalty been to himself and his own ambition all along rather than to Bumblestar?

Ashstar shot a questioning look at the reddish-brown tom. "I thought you said Bumblestar had changed his mind, Foxleap?"

Foxleap tilted his head awkwardly, but did not respond.

"So you're going against Bumblestar's wishes? What do you think he'll think when he finds out about this?" Rowanstar asked.

Foxleap chuckled. "Bumblestar will appreciate it eventually. He's not aggressive enough; I had to take the initiative. There's no time to be wasted letting our warriors recover when we could be ruling all of the Clan territories!"

"I'll decide what I appreciate and what actions are appropriate," said a familiar, cold voice.

Bumblestar strolled in through the camp entrance, glowering at Foxleap. The ThunderClan deputy returned his glare with an apathetic, unwavering stare. This seemed to infuriate the ThunderClan leader even more. Bumblestar marched towards the deputy, drawing himself up to his full height so that he towered over Foxleap. "What do you have to say for yourself?!" Bumblestar snarled.

Foxleap didn't flinch or seem the least bit concerned. "We were going to take the land eventually anyways. There was no need to wait; now was the perfect time."

Bumblestar's glare intensified. "I said that we were not going to go with Ashstar to attack ShadowClan today! Our cats are still wounded; it's not the time for claiming this land yet! And I don't

even know who these rogues are that you've brought with you! Regardless, you are not the leader of ThunderClan, and you don't get to circumvent my wishes!"

"I make choices that will benefit ThunderClan in the end, and I will continue to do so," Foxleap replied calmly.

Bumblestar, with a crazed look in his eyes, tackled the ThunderClan deputy and prepared for the death blow. "Nobody disobeys me and gets away with it!"

Before anyone could say another word, Bumblestar's paw had swung down and his claws had sliced across Foxleap's throat.

A/N 2: I hope you guys enjoyed! Please comment with your thoughts; I always love to know what you guys think!

Chapter Six: The Cure

Bumblestar POV

Blood seeped across my claws. I saw the glint of the afternoon sunlight reflecting across the scarlet liquid. The murmuring of stunned voices surrounded me, yet they were muffled in my ears. This whole scenario felt like a dream. How could Foxleap, the cat that I had trusted above anyone else, have betrayed me? It was a strange feeling that washed over me, one that is quite hard to describe. It was the feeling of being alone in a crowd; it was a mixture of pure pain and rage at the world. I stepped away from Foxleap's body and closed my eyes. Various memories flickered through my mind.

Bramblestar returned my gaze, a glimmer of disappointment in his eyes. "I trusted you. But you let me down."

Bramblestar. I hadn't thought of the former ThunderClan leader in a long time. I suppose I understood though how he had felt when he had realized that his deputy was a disloyal traitor. Trust was a mistake, one that would always be punished in the end.

Brackenfur gave me a scalding glare. "One day this will come back to haunt you."

Oh, how ironic that it had. Brackenfur had been one of the most vocal critics of my decisions in the old days, and had killed Mousewhisker, the most loyal servant I ever had, except possibly Nightpaw and Redpaw. Perhaps that moment, when I watched Brackenfur's claws slice across Mousewhisker's throat, was when I had learned not to tolerate dissent.

Droplets of blood rolled down Dovewing's soft gray cheek. Pure terror flashed in her green eyes as she stared at me with revulsion in her expression.

Dovewing had been the first cat to betray me, to choose another cat or purpose over me. I had been so unspeakably angry that day, just as I was today. I remembered the shock and terror in her eyes after my claws had sliced across her cheek and the rivulets of blood had rolled down her face.

In that moment, I understood. Foxleap had always only acted out of his own self-interest; his only motivation for his loyalty to me was his ambition. Cats that viewed me as the path to power were not the answer. I needed servants who would perceive me as a force as great or as mystical as StarClan was said to be. I would become the new StarClan of the forest; cats would look to me for guidance and would adhere to my will! But for now, there would be no more trust, no more granting power to the weaker cats. Until the next generation was prepared to serve me, I could only have faith in myself.

I also realized then how much I had accomplished. I had taken control of a Clan with carefully executed schemes, I had won many battles against many foes, and had disposed of those who had stood in my way. ShadowClan and the situation regarding Foxleap's betrayal were just a few more obstacles to conquer. I would not allow these foolish cats to stop me from achieving my goals.

I glared at Foxleap's patrol. "I suggest that all of you leave, unless you wish to share the same fate as Foxleap."

"Who do you think you are?" roared a massive tom with matted brown fur, leaping at me.

I did not answer. I simply sidestepped and sliced my claws across his throat. The rogue's amber eyes widened with surprise as he fell to the ground. His eyes told me that he must've held the incorrect notion that he was invincible. He gasped desperately for breath, coughing up a few mouthfuls of blood, and then was still.

I chuckled as the light faded from his eyes. Foxleap's patrol

hurriedly dispersed, fleeing the ShadowClan camp.

Ashstar approached me nervously, her head down. "I'm truly sorry, Bumblestar. Foxleap said that you had changed your mind about attacking ShadowClan."

I glared at her in response, then turned to face the ShadowClan cats. "There will be peace for a moon. The cats of all of the Clans need to recover."

"I never thought you would be the type to advise peace," Rowanstar spat.

I laughed maniacally. "It's hardly peace! After a moon, I fully expect ShadowClan to be gone or to surrender to my Clan. If you continue to defy my will after that...you will be eradicated like the plague that you are!"

Rowanstar narrowed his eyes. "The only Clan that resembles a disease is yours."

"I think you're quite wrong," I replied. "You'll understand soon enough!"

"There is nothing to understand in your madness," Rowanstar hissed.

I walked slowly out of the ShadowClan camp, past the WindClan cats who were still standing behind their leader. "For every illness, there is a cure. I am the cure for the disease you refer to as ShadowClan. You'll all be wiped out soon enough."

A/N: New chapter! And I've made a promise to my good friend here on Wattpad awesomesauceoreos so I will be uploading another chapter within the next few daysas well! :) I hope you guys enjoyed, as always thank you for reading and for your wonderful votes and comments!

Also, I'm extremely active on CloudtailGrandmas so if you're looking to read some fantastic Warriors writing, be sure to go check out that account! I'm going to have written 10 or more updates for CG in this month alone, and we have 26 active

stories that are updated consistently every 3-7 days! We have both serious stories and humor books, so we have pretty much anything you're looking for.

Chapter Seven: Should It Matter?

Shadepaw POV

Ashstar shot a look of animosity at Rowanstar, then wordlessly gestured for her cats to leave. The WindClan patrol exited from the camp behind Bumblestar.

With many different thoughts and emotions rushing through my mind, I stared at Foxleap's body, which was lying on the ground near the ShadowClan camp entrance. The fur on his throat was stained bright red, and his head was resting at an awkward angle in a pool of his own blood. His amber eyes were still half-open, but looked dull and empty.

I had been horrified when Foxleap had revealed to me that he was my father. Foxleap was a cat that I had considered to be purely evil and power-hungry. He had been the second-in-command for the most sinister cat to ever live by the lake, and his ambitiousness had surpassed perhaps even that of Bumblestar. I did not want to have any relation to a cat such as him. I had always imagined my father being a valiant warrior who had perhaps been struck down bravely opposing Bumblestar, or had perished defending his Clan in battle. I had always wanted a hero as a father, someone who I could look up to and who would serve as a role model.

Instead, my father had turned out to be Bumblestar's servant, who desired power and status over following the warrior code and obeying the will of StarClan. He had aided Bumblestar in abducting innocent ShadowClan cats when Bumblestar had devised the plan to kill Ratscar and Graypaw in front of an audience of ThunderClan cats. He had protected Bumblestar from adversaries, and had advised him on how to proceed with his evil schemes. He had brought the patrol to the ShadowClan camp to wipe out my new Clan when even Bumblestar had recognized that a temporary period of peace was necessary.

And yet, I couldn't forget the way that he had attacked the fox to protect me, and then had allowed me to escape. I couldn't erase the image from my mind of the way he had looked at me when he admitted his relation to me. Perhaps I had imagined it, but I could've sworn that I had seen a trace of love in his eyes.

I could not help but to ponder whether or not Foxleap had truly cared about me, and if things could've ended differently. Under different circumstances, would I have had a close relationship with him? If he had not been promoted to the deputy position, would his behavior have been different? I had so many questions that were centered around him. Why had my mother never spoken about him? Why had he never been there to watch me and my brother grow up, and to teach us the ways of a warrior? If he had actually wanted me to escape and find a safe home, why had he chosen to attempt to advance Bumblestar's goals of domination of the entire forest rather than leaving my sanctuary in peace?

Someone nudged me on my right shoulder. "Shadepaw, are you okay?"

I shook my head to clear it, and then glanced to my right. It was Tawnypelt, my mentor, who was looking at me with concern in her green eyes. "Yeah, I'm fine," I said, trying to sound convincing.

Tawnypelt gave me a skeptical look. "Are you sure about that? Whatever it is, you can tell me, Shadepaw. What's wrong?"

I took a deep breath. Every cat around the lake was better off for Foxleap's death. He was nothing but an evil cat who had finally gotten what he deserved. It shouldn't have mattered to me. There was no reason for me to care about him.

"Nothing is wrong," I replied. "Nothing at all."

Bumblestar POV

The sun was just beginning to dip beneath the horizon as I arrived back at the ThunderClan camp. A pale, orange glow illuminated the camp as I emerged into the stone hollow through the thorn tunnel. The sky was tinged with a few different shades of pink as well as

purple, and a few wisps of silvery clouds drifted across the colorful backdrop. I noticed that Nightpaw was sitting outside the warriors den, looking as if he had been waiting for my return. I padded over to greet the black-furred apprentice.

"Welcome back, Bumblestar!" Nightpaw said cheerfully. "I've been waiting for you."

I chuckled at the young tom's enthusiasm. He was developing into an excellent servant. I could not wait for him to be old enough to become a warrior. "Thank you, Nightpaw. There are many more lessons still to learn tomorrow in training. However, since you and Redpaw did not get to finish your skirmish today, I've decided to allow both of you to go to the Gathering."

Nightpaw's eyes widened. "Really? Thank you so much, Bumblestar! Oh, and by the way, is it true what I heard, that Foxleap is dead?"

I nodded. "Yes, it is."

"Who are you appointing as the new deputy?" Nightpaw asked.

"Nobody. I do not need a deputy for now," I answered. "But eventually, I intend to select you as my deputy. I believe that you can carry on my legacy."

Nightpaw's eyes glowed with excitement. "What an honor that would be! I really am flattered, Bumblestar! I'll serve you, no matter what!"

"I know you will," I replied.

A/N: Two quick updates! I hope that you guys have enjoyed! :)

Chapter Eight: Inner Demons

Nightpaw POV

The walk to the Gathering was long and tedious. The leaves shone silver in the shadowy glow of twilight, dangling from the venerable branches. The soil beneath my paws was damp from the afternoon rain that halted not long ago. Nobody had spoken a word throughout the trip, until Streamheart whispered something to Spiderleg. The black-furred tom chuckled, to receive a scalding glare from Bumblestar.

"What's so funny?" demanded the ThunderClan leader. "Care to share it with the rest of us?"

Spiderleg looked away. "It was nothing."

"It better be." The villainous tabby lashed his tail and drifted over to my side. "Remember, when you're leader, any cat that has time to laugh and make a fool of themselves is not deputy material. Jokes never won any battles."

I stared at my paws and nodded. "You're right."

So Bumblestar wanted me to be his successor, and yet I could hardly be near him without wanting to gag. Was I not following right in his footsteps? I had little doubt that he had deceived Bramblestar in much the same way, with shows of unconditional loyalty. While he claimed that he had tried to save the dark brown tabby, there was no question in my mind that he had masterminded ShadowClan's assault on the leader's den.

Wasn't it ironic that ShadowClan, on the brink of being forced from their own camp by the lunatic, had set his leadership into motion? They had invited death into their midst by the evil they harbored in their hearts. The strategic notion of utilizing outside help was brilliant; it was also impractical under the present circumstances.

I was plotting the same treachery, but I would have to act alone. It was impossible to know the warriors who were allegiant to Bumblestar from those who wished to rebel. Who was to say that after the traitorous moron was dispatched, the Clan would back my leadership? After all, when he waltzed back into my camp, the whole Clan had stood by and watched as he instructed Foxleap to maul my mother. Foxleap. The russet tom had held no redeeming aspects to his personality; his death had at least cleansed ThunderClan of one of the sociopaths in power. How could he live with himself after the agony that he had caused my mother?

I recalled the innocence of kithood disappearing in one fleeting moment. Sandstorm, now slain by Bumblestar's claws, had tried to intercept me and my brother. We distracted her with a ruse and darted into the clearing, only to be greeted by a gruesome sight. Our mother, who had been the only loving figure in my life, was now strewn on the floor. Her vibrant white underbelly was coated with a scarlet hue and in many places, the fur had been ripped away. The eyes were the most jarring feature, mutilated into watery pink chunks of goo. Blood was streaming from the sockets, and yet I could not rationalize that she was damaged beyond repair. I had nudged her fervently; then upon finding her unresponsive, I had buried my nose in her fur and wailed. There was a distinctive scent of death that tinged her fur, and it was almost unbearable. It was like the stench of an entire pile of crowfood drifting up my nostrils, multiplying with my sorrow.

This memory was all that allowed me to maintain my resolve. Would I, in rehashing Bumblestar's sins, become like him? Would I unearth inner demons that I should never discover? Perhaps. But my mother's fate was just one example of the suffering that he had inflicted. I was not the only one to grieve a family member because of him, and if I didn't stop him, I wouldn't be the last.

Bumblestar nudged me to the front of the group, snapping me out of my trance. "Lead the way! Sink your claws into it."

We had arrived at the tree bridge. Its color was a dark, rich brown that was practically black; some of the bark was peeling away from the trunk. I clambered up the roots and felt it wobble beneath by my paws. My weight began to tip to the left, and I flailed about

momentarily before remembering Bumblestar's advice. I dug my claws into the bark; after steadying myself, I began to inch forward. The water, which had looked so placid from the shore, was churning just tail-lengths below. My heart was pounding against my rib cage.

"There goes the next deputy of ThunderClan!" Bumblestar yowled sardonically.

I lowered my head in embarassment and picked up the pace, scurrying across the log. As I reached the island, WindClan sauntered up to join the group, and their warriors began to intermingle with our trekkers. Ashstar mewed a greeting to Bumblestar in a cordial tone. I questioned whether he would keep the alliance, and I wondered if he would mince words about her unsanctioned attack on ShadowClan.

Bumblestar POV

Ashstar behaved as if all was forgiven, and while I did not appreciate her stunt with Foxleap, I knew that I could not afford to make an enemy of all three Clans. She was ambitious without the underlying intent of backstabbing me, and if my late deputy had taught me anything, it was that that was difficult to find. I loathed small talk, but for this dialogue, I needed to project a friendly persona.

"Good evening! How is the prey running? Are your cats recovering?" I asked.

Ashstar leapt onto the trunk and swished her tail as an indicator for me to follow. "WindClan is well! The sooner we drive ShadowClan and RiverClan from the lake, the better. We keep them isolated and they stand no chance."

I chuckled at the idea of Rowanstar, alone and cowering in fear at the realization of death. "We need patience, my friend. Quickness is where errors are made."

"I trust you and I will submit to your plans, but I think that a moon of peace is too long." Ashstar dismounted the bridge and surveyed

the clearing. "We cannot let them fully recover and be at peak strength. We have injured them, and now we must go for the kill."

The image of Blackstar, desperation alight in his eyes, groveling for help as the fire closed in, flashed before me. His pleas had been nearly kit-like; he could not reconcile the idea of death in his mind. The flames were closing in on Rowanstar now too. I would let him glimpse an escape, only to snatch it away at the last heartbeat. There would be no salvation for ShadowClan.

"I have no intention of waiting a moon; I merely want to lull them into a false sense of security. I will personally send word to your camp when I wish to attack," I meowed, descending onto the sandy shore.

Moonhigh was already upon us, but ShadowClan and RiverClan had yet to arrive. Where could they be?

I spotted a lone figure bounding toward the bridge, but one of smaller stature and with a lighter ginger pelt than Rowanstar's. The cat nearly toppled into the water as they sprinted across, urgency usurping balance. It was Ambershade, one of the three warriors I had left behind to guard the hollow. Why was she defying my order to stay behind as a sentinel?

I sprung down from the spindle and drew myself to full height, storming over to the warrior. "What are you doing here?!"

Ambershade, gasping for breath, locked eyes with me. "ShadowClan and RiverClan have invaded our camp!"

A/N: It's a been a long time oof, but here's a chapter for the memories! <3

Chapter Nine: Bleak Reality

Nightpaw POV

It was eerily quiet as we entered our camp. The group fanned out, searching the premises for any sign of the invaders. All that was left were the two bodies of our sentinels lying in the center of the area. Seedflower and Lilyshade. The blood-soaked grass reflected the silver glow of the moon, illuminating the latest victims of these conflicts. I wondered if we would even have a vigil held for them.

"I should have never left them. To die alone, hopelessly outnumbered and outmatched. Two whole Clans against three cats. Why would they do such a thing?" Ambershade wailed.

It was obvious; they knew that the night of the Gathering would be the perfect opportunity. They knew it would give them the element of surprise, that just for one incident they could have the upper hand. The temporary truce was never going to last, and sitting around waiting for Bumblestar's next move would be a death sentence. The only way was to go on the offensive, to opt against passivity and leap into action.

Realization dawned on me, its cold claws sinking into my heart. It was exactly as I feared; in playing the part of Bumblestar's puppet, I was becoming like him. My heart had hardened to the bleak reality that was spelled out before us. What kind of warrior's first reaction to the death of his Clanmates was to logically ponder their killers' reasoning? I had witnessed so much death in such a short time that it barely meant anything to me anymore. Where did this end? What was the point of such suffering?

Bumblestar seemed as unfazed as I was, gazing at the bodies with distinctive indifference. "ShadowClan and RiverClan made the first move it seems. Good for them. Perhaps they aren't so stupid after all!"

Ashstar shouldered her way through the crowd, eyes sweeping the hollow as though she was committing every detail of the scene to memory. She approached the slain warriors and bowed her head in respect. Her actions said everything without her uttering a word. ThunderClan and WindClan warriors alike followed her example, dipping their heads to honor the fallen. As they formed a circle around the corpses, I was struck by the magnitude of the display. It was a show of reverence and unity. Perhaps not all was lost. Perhaps good could still regain a foothold in the world.

I stepped into the circle, closing my eyes. Meditating on the warrior code and the ways of StarClan, I felt the flame of determination rekindled in my heart. My Clan, all of the Clans, needed me to be strong and remain undeterred.

As I reopened my eyes and glanced behind me, I saw Bumblestar, eyes narrowed, hanging back from the crowd. The scene of compassion appeared to have only stoked his temper.

From the edge of my vision, I saw Jayfeather emerge from his den. He must have slipped away while the crowd was focused on the impromptu memorial. The medicine cat seemed distraught, fur bristling on his spine.

"Our herbs: they're all gone! They've been stolen!" Jayfeather shouted.

Bumblestar POV

I could barely restrain myself from snarling or intervening as members of both Clans paid their respects to Seedflower and Lilyshade. This behavior reeked of weakness; the embarrassment at leading such a soft bunch of "warriors" was unbearable. Why would Ashstar take such pathetic actions? It was a poor example for any leader that wanted to project power to their suboordinates.

And why had Nightpaw joined this sniveling display? My protégé had no business dealing with sympathy and love. This was a war, not a game for kits. It was not for the faint of heart, and it was not a time for everyone to be caught up with emotion. I wanted to drag him away, lifting him by the scruff and snapping him out of this

foolish trance. But that risked the backlash of Ashstar and my own Clan, so I sunk my claws into the dirt and watched. It took all of my willpower to do nothing. My teeth were gritted with such force that I thought they might break each other in half.

Fortunately, Jayfeather helped my cause for the first time ever. After he declared that the herbs had been taken in the raid, he had returned to the crowd to a mood of outrage. Indignant yowls sounded throughout the camp, and all eyes turned to me. Posing the question that should have been on everyone's minds the entire time: what do we do now?

I strutted up to stand alongside Ashstar, surveying my audience. "We must retaliate immediately! We must take down ShadowClan and RiverClan with no rules to hold us back, and we must show no mercy. ShadowClan will be eliminated first, as they are the weakest. After tonight, we will rule the lake! Our Clans will possess power that has been unknown to any that have come before us!"

The warriors cheered, and without another word, I began to lead the way to ShadowClan's camp. The forest passed by in a blur, the concept of time vanishing in my haze of rage. My claws unsheathed as we crossed the ShadowClan border, ready to strike down the first enemy I saw.

A gray shape appeared next to me. I could practically taste the salty blood in my mouth, and I was salivating at the thought. The hunger for death overwhelmed me and I curled my teeth, feeling all control leave my being. I turned without telling myself to, every muscle in my body trembling in the anticipation of the kill.

My gaze fixed on the target, and I registered that it was Ashstar. She had caught up to me, likely wishing to lead the attacking party together. Mustering every ounce of restraint I had left, I reined in my impulses. My breath was coming in ragged gulps, and judging by the confusion that registered on the WindClan leader's face as she detected my stare, the wild intensity I felt shone in my eyes.

The patrol arrived at the ShadowClan camp, and I charged through the entrance without hesitation. There was no need for a calculated plan; the plan now was to kill everything that moved. It was

unmistakable that this was a deciding moment in warrior history. The gravity of this event hung in the air, impressing itself on my mind. Only one side would emerge victorious. There would be no retreats and no surrenders; this was the final battle, and it would be fought fiercely to the death. If we could triumph here, this day would be told in legends for seasons to come.

As my warriors swarmed into the camp, we were met with no resistance. There were no ShadowClan or RiverClan cats in sight. I raced to each of the dens, searching for a single face. Once the residence of an entire Clan, this hollow was now an abandoned clearing. It was desolate and lifeless, showing no signs of the bustling community it had once given shelter to.

What was the meaning of this? They hadn't lingered in ThunderClan territory after their raid. Why had they not returned to their camp?

And then it hit me. How could I not have seen it? I had been blinded by anger, and it had cost us precious time. We could have avoided wasting our energy and chasing ghosts if someone had thought to pause to check the scent trails.

After they struck the ThunderClan camp, Mistystar and Rowanstar must have set their eyes on the WindClan camp next.

Chapter Ten: Final Stand

Shadepaw POV

I wasn't sure if I wanted to attend the Gathering. Facing ThunderClan after deserting them was always going to be difficult, but to do it so soon? Tensions were running high enough without my presence complicating things further. While even Bumblestar wouldn't violate the sanctity of the event, there was sure to be hostility from his warriors when they saw me. And anyways, the idea of a night of peace rang hollow, with the deadline for our surrender looming just a few days away.

There was more to my dilemma though. Should I approach Nightpaw if I saw him? Would he be able to talk to me with cordiality in such a public forum, or would he put on a show of hatred to save face? I would have no idea how to act. It would just be simpler if Rowanstar didn't invite me. I had just transferred from an enemy Clan anyways; there was no way I had garnered enough trust or respect to warrant my inclusion. This worrying was for nothing.

Rowanstar emerged from his den at that moment and yowled a summons. "You are all expecting me to pick a group to attend the Gathering. But we will not be attending tonight. I hate to defy the will of StarClan, but these are grim times. I'm sure our brave warrior ancestors would understand we are doing what we must to survive! We will attack ThunderClan's camp, and then do the same to WindClan's.

I know some of you may not approve. But this is the only way we can catch them off guard, at their weakest point. If there was any other option, believe me, I would take it. I need all of you with me! After tonight, we cannot return here, as once they find out what we've done, they will try to retaliate.

Elders and kits will camp by the horseplace in RiverClan territory. This has already been discussed and cleared by Mistystar. We'll

make our final stand there. For ShadowClan and for StarClan!"

To say I was dumbfounded by this proclamation would be an understatement. Glancing around the assembly, I saw both nods of agreement and conflicted expressions. The idea of launching an attack during a Gathering went against everything we stood for and the very heart of the warrior code. It would have been unthinkable just a few moons ago, and yet now, here we were. Even those of us hesitant to defy tradition could grasp the reasoning.

There was a palpable sense of desperation among us. We knew we were losing the war despite our best efforts, and if we had to stoop to Bumblestar's level to turn the tide, then so be it.

Fawnpaw, who was seated beside me, shot a nervous look in my direction. "Shadepaw, we aren't ready for battle. We've hardly started training, we're no more than kits."

"We have to be ready. There is no choice," I replied, somehow keeping my voice level.

Fawnpaw wasn't wrong though. A warrior would obliterate an apprentice who had barely turned six moons old and had only the most rudimentary battle training. Under Bumblestar's rogue-like leadership, ThunderClan would be encouraged to finish off a defeated enemy; the warrior code had no bearing on their conduct. Those arrogant mouse-brains trampled on and defiled Clan values and honor with impunity. I had to resign myself to the fact that I may join the ranks of my warrior ancestors today. My life would be too short if it ended now; there was still so much I wanted to do, so many experiences left to acquire. The thought of fleeing flitted across my mind, but I pushed it away as soon as it surfaced. It would be better to die a martyr than to survive as a coward.

I spotted Rowanstar approaching us, flanked by our mentors. Had he sensed our fear? Was he coming to reprimand us?

"The kits and the elders will need an escort. They cannot defend themselves if anything happens." The ShadowClan leader paused, studying our expressions. "I've tasked you two and your mentors with accompanying them. It may seem like I'm sidelining you, but

it's quite the opposite. There will be plenty of us to overtake their weakened camps. This is an important job, and it's your chance to prove yourselves. We will join you shortly, until then, don't let me down."

Rowanstar marched through the throng of cats, head held high. There was something regal in his posture, something inspiring in his confidence. With a swish of his tail, he signaled for the warriors to follow him. The group sprinted off, vanishing into the murk of the forest. I felt a twinge in my heart, as though I was saying good-bye to them for the last time. Something inside of me knew that I would never see any of them again. I didn't know how I was so sure, but the finality of this moment gripped my soul with firm claws.

"Shadepaw? Shadepaw, snap out of it!" Tawnypelt hissed. "There's no time for standing around, we must get moving! The elders can't move quickly, and we need to be at horseplace by moonhigh."

I blinked a few times, hoping to clear my mind. It was just a silly feeling; my nerves must have been more frazzled than I thought. I had to believe that this all would go according to plan. But despite all of the logic I tossed around in my head, the sense of foreboding lingered all the same. As our party set off, my paws were trembling with dread.

Chapter Eleven: The Beginning of the End

Bumblestar POV

A solemn look hovered on Ashstar's face as I informed her of ShadowClan's true plan. She said nothing, digesting what I had told her bit by bit. Her calmness and poise in such a heated situation was commendable; I could perhaps tolerate her presence alongside me as I ruled the lake after all.

"By the time we reach our camp, it will be too late. We must intercept them another way," said Ashstar.

She was right. Much of our warriors' energy had been expended racing over to retaliate against ShadowClan, but even if we were in our best condition, it would be near sunhigh before we could arrive in WindClan territory. This strike had been calculated to perfection, and it was embarrassing how well it had worked. Rowanstar was not as pitiful and mouse-brained as he appeared. If he could just forsake that foolish warrior code nonsense, his high and mighty attitude, he could have been as ruthless a leader as I! Honor was a mere tale for kits, and with his Clan's survival on the line, he had glimpsed the truth.

It would be even more satisfying to shred his throat now, to toss aside his mangled body. Rowanstar made a worthy, cunning foe, but he did not have the advantage I had. My insatiable lust for blood and power would guide my actions and snuff out any semblance of remorse. I was not held back by feelings as he was.

As I stood in the ShadowClan camp contemplating the situation, I felt the itch of sadism intensify to a crescendo. The burning sensation in my paws was overwhelming; I needed a kill soon. It had been too long since I had been able to unleash the beast. It was always present, gnawing at the back of my mind, clamoring for me

to relinquish control. My restraint was waning, but I only had to cling to this civilized veneer for a bit longer.

"Bumblestar?" Ashstar inspected me, worry shrouding her gaze. "Are you alright?"

I returned her stare, hoping my expression was placid enough to assuage her fears. "Yes, I'm fine. Just got lost in thought."

The WindClan leader did not seem fully convinced, but she did not voice any further concerns. "I think we should head to RiverClan territory. I think it is likely that they either cross back through there, or hide out there."

"I agree. Let's get moving!" I yowled.

Our party traipsed off in the direction of the border. There was no chatter among ourselves, only the sound of twigs crunching underneath our feet announcing our movement. The eerie silence reminded me of the wordless shock that had enveloped the ThunderClan camp following Sandstorm's death. The context of the mood in this circumstance was something quite different; it was though they were witnessing their own demise, slow and agonizing. The knowledge that this would be the final meeting of the two sides must have spawned a somber dialogue in their minds. There was a particular horror I spotted in the senior warriors' eyes; I could only guess that they were horrified at what the Clans had devolved into. Hardly more than an assembly of rogues strung together by tradition.

The stench of ShadowClan wafted toward us, alerting us to a small group nearby. I dropped into a crouch, and the rest of the group followed my example. As we inched up on them, gaining ground despite our stealth, I was stunned to see how slow the party was moving. They were no faster than an adder crawling on the ground. Why did they not advance with more urgency? Where was the rest of the Clan?

Then it occurred to me. This was an evacuation of the kits and the elders, likely with a few warriors as an escort. My logic was confirmed as I made out the shape of a scrawny elder, hobbling a

few fox-lengths behind the group. One of the cats circled back and nudged the straggler along, but even with the sluggish pace the entourage was travelling at, the limping elder could not keep up. I could not help but to chuckle at the foolishness; this was the most pathetic thing I'd seen in my entire life, and mind you, I've seen Blossomfall die.

A few ShadowClan cats' ears pricked up, indicating that they had heard my laughter. It did not matter if we had the element of surprise or not; with our size advantage, we would have no problem overwhelming them or catching any of them who attempted a cowardly escape.

"Overtake them, wound them, and pin them to the ground, but I don't want them dead until we've interrogated them," I hissed.

The escort patrol hardly had time to react before they had been subdued. They were felled as easily as greencough taking out a newborn kit. The hobbling elder yowled in protest, but he thought better of making any further noise as I shot a scorching look in his direction. I sat down, sweeping my eyes over our ragtag prisoners.

"Well, well, well, I've seen rainstorms more troublesome than you lot." I forced a bored expression on my face, relishing the opportunity to mock these ShadowClan fools. "Now, you'll tell me what I want to know if you want to live."

Of course, they were not surviving this under any circumstances. I think they knew I had no intention of letting them go. One cat, who I recognized as Tawnypelt, writhed beneath her captors' grasp. It was an exercise in futility, but she struggled anyways. In spite of the hopeless circumstances, she possessed a fighting spirit that refused to be tamed and to go down with ease. She raised her head and flashed me a defiant look. My eyes narrowed to slits; I was confounded by this show of resistance.

But that was quite alright. If they did not want to comply, I would be more than happy to torture them until they did. The real fun was just beginning.

A/N: Hope you guys are enjoying the new chapters! Thanks for

reading!